

# EVERY KID LOST IN A PARK



**September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Animated as a sign language interpreter, Jessica-Pierce Lopez of the U.S. Forest Service captivates local youth as she explains the geologic history surrounding Lost Lake. All part of an outreach effort designed to celebrate National Public Lands Day and a National Campaign to bring kids to the Forest.**

**NATIONAL PUBLIC LANDS DAY** -This is the only time year a yellow school bus is camouflage. Three Delta County school buses fit right into the scenic Gunnison National Forest as it passed through a tunnel of golden aspen trees ruffling in the breeze—almost applauding the arrival of 130 local fourth graders.

This year, the Paonia Ranger District celebrated National Public Lands Day by inviting every single fourth student from the North Fork Valley to Lost Lake Campground, a treasured site on the Gunnison National Forest.

National Public Lands Day always occurs one of the last weekends in the month of September and created to preserve and protect America's natural heritage. What began in 1994 with 700 volunteers has grown to over 200,000 volunteers nationwide at more than 2,500 sites —participating in trail maintenance projects, tree planting and habitat restoration, invasive species removal, and contributing to educational programs—just like the 40 volunteers and Forest Service Staff that helped facilitate the program at Lost Lake, which included five structured educational stations, a naturalist hike led by the Western Slope Conservation Center, and a stewardship project where students constructed 10 bat houses.





Stations included: Uncovering the Geology of Lost Lake, practicing the 7 Principals of Leave No Trace, learning to use strange forestry tools, meeting mules from the Rocky Mountain Regional Pack String, and Identifying wacky weeds.

Last year, the Paonia Ranger district chose to focus efforts on clearing overgrown sections of one of the Districts most popular trails, Dark Canyon Trail. “This year, the Paonia Ranger District was proud to host an educational program to local youth. The Forest Service as an agency is expanding our educational programing, specifically for fourth graders to promote EKIP,” explained Paul Kimpling of the USFS, who helped coordinate the event. EKIP, Every Kid in a Park—is a new initiative signed by President Obama to encourage kids to discover public lands. EKIP allows every 4<sup>th</sup> grader to download a voucher to receive unlimited day-passes to any federally managed lands or waters for a year.

## POINTING AT LOST LAKE GEOLOGY



Uncovering the Geology at Lost Lake. Although you learn at a young age, it’s not nice to point. Students broke all the rules at this station led by Jessica-Pierce Lopez and Liane Mattson—which seemed to be the easiest to point at all mountain peaks and moraines left by heavy glacial activity in the area. The duo also made a helpful model for students use and point at.

## MEETING THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGIONAL PACK STRING



Students anxiously waited to pet two mules, Jimmy and Bruce from the Rocky Mountain Regional Pack String as Barrett Funka, Natural Resource Specialist, finished his presentation about the Pack String’s historic contributions to public lands and their value working in designated wilderness areas.



## LEARNING TO USE STRANGE FORESTRY TOOLS



(Left) Forester Cari Johnson explains how to use a wedge prism, which is used to measure basal areas. Students learned how to use all the strange tools and contraptions that foresters use in the field—such as, a girthing tape to measure the diameter (Right) and a clinometer which estimates tree height (Below).



Otis Beasen, student from the Crawford Montessori school said his favorite station learning how to use strange forest tools and thinks it would being a forester would seem cool.



## STEWARDSHIP AND PARTNERSHIP



**(Left) Among the helpful volunteers was Paonia’s own Mayor, Neal Schwieterman, who gave a quick lesson about bats and quizzed students. (Center) Bill Mann keeps a watchful eye over students as they construct bat houses—which will increase bat habitat. (Right) Students prideful haul their completed bat house back to the bus.**

Students participated in a stewardship project where students built 10 bat houses which will be installed at their respective school—increasing habitat in urban environments. “Engaging kids in a restoration project helps build knowledge about natural resources and tool for conservation.” said Neal Schwieterman, current Mayor of Paonia who helped oversee this project. Although the costs were minimal for the stewardship project, the wildlife program of the US Forest Service was able to fund all of the materials. Students from the US Job Corps in Collbran helped prefabricate and paint pieces for the kids to easily assemble and connect under a watchful eye. “This event would not be the same without the collaborative efforts of various partners and organizations in our community,” said Kimpling. Partners like the Western Slope Conservation Center, a non-profit environmental conservation organization based in Paonia helped lead the naturalist hike and the overall implementation of the event. “Without a budget, we reached out to our community and organizations who share a passion for conservation education. We are grateful for the relationships that have been built and how these partnership helped increase our resources and moved this event forward.” The event also connected community volunteers to our forest and youth—building a meaningful outdoor classroom and encouraging future visits.



## SUSTAINABILITY

Woodsy Owl, famous for quotes like “Give a Hoot, Don’t Pollute,” and “Lend a Hand Care for The Land” made an appearance at the event. Woodsy, who celebrated his 44<sup>th</sup> birthday only weeks before, gave high-fives and directed kids to the trash and recycling center which was set up at the picnic area. The US Forest Service has been finding ways to integrate environmental footprint reductions. A voluntary inner-agency Sustainable Operations team evaluated and helped recommend creative ways to keep this educational program green and lead by example. Such as having recycling available to students and providing rideshares for volunteers.



“It was great to have the kids take a break from the typical classroom. Instead of losing them in a book, for a day we were able to bring students to the National Forest to get lost in nature,” said Sam Cox, Principal of Paonia Elementary School.

To see photos, please check out the [Rocky Mountain Region 2 Flickr](#) page. See other helpful EKIP Program: <https://everykidinapark.gov/>